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# THE BAY CITY TIMES

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## Bottom silt to be removed in 60 days to help shipping

Thursday, June 15, 2006

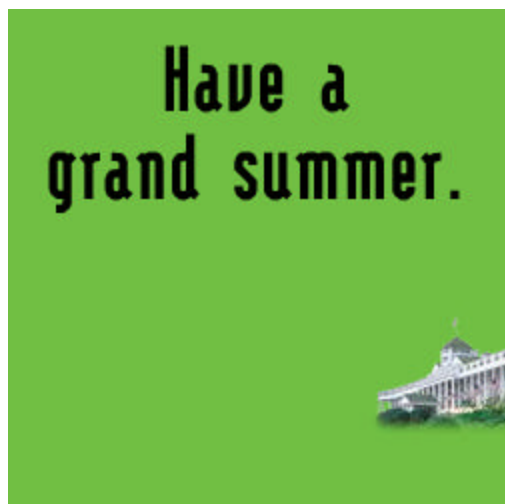
**By JEREMIAH STETTLER**  
TIMES NEWS SERVICE

The Saginaw River is about to get a little deeper.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will cut into the Saginaw River bottom next week to remove the silt that threatens to strangle shipping in Saginaw County.

Corps officials awarded a \$2 million contract this week to Muskegon-based Great Lakes Dock and Materials to dredge the turning basin north of the Interstate 675 Henry G. Marsh Bridge and a mile-long stretch of the river channel downstream.

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The company will begin work Monday and have the shipping channel clear within 60 days.

William Webber, spokesman for a coalition of dock owners known as the Saginaw River Alliance, said the survival of river commerce depends on dredging.

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Just last week, the 580-foot McKee Sons barge ran aground in the upper Saginaw River, destroying a rudder and damaging another, Webber said. The shipping company Lower Lakes Towing now has informed Webber that its vessels no longer will venture that far upstream.

"We hope that policy will change when the dredging is done," he said.

While the corps' emergency dredging of the Saginaw River won't provide a permanent fix, Chief of Operations Wayne Schloop said it should keep freighters afloat until officials can dredge the river deeper.

"It is basically what would meet their minimum needs," Schloop said.

The corps plans to remove at least 5 feet from the shallows of Saginaw's only turning basin. The basin now measures about 15 feet deep with patches as shallow as 13 feet. Contractors plan to deepen that channel to 20 feet.

Dredging then will continue for a mile downstream, dropping the river bottom to 20 feet from 18 feet.

Ultimately, officials want to create a 22-foot shipping channel, Schloop said. But that will have to wait until the agency finishes a 281-acre dump site for dredge spoils in Zilwaukee and Frankenlust townships.

The site, now under construction, will hold up to 3.1 million cubic yards of dredge spoils.

The emergency dredging of the Saginaw River will produce considerably less material. Officials plan to remove 103,000 cubic yards of silt from the shipping channel over the next two months.

Contractors then will ferry the material downstream to a disposal island at the mouth of the Saginaw River.

The U.S. House of Representatives recently approved \$3.6 million for additional dredging in the Saginaw River. The request, which represents a 50 percent increase over last year, now goes before the Senate for a vote.

Funding for the Saginaw River would go into effect in October, the start of the 2007 fiscal year.

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